

Qualia

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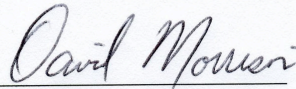
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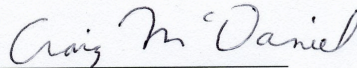
Qualia

By
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Master of Fine Arts

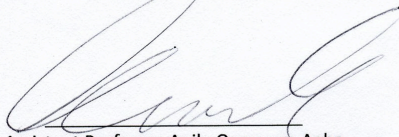
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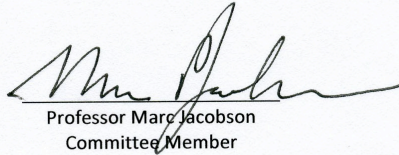
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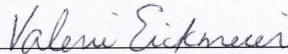


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INTRODUCTION: QUALIA

When I look back at times that once were, and where I am today, I find one consistent factor. I have just as many questions today as I did back then. I do not remember my 9th birthday, I do not know the exact location I was on January 3rd, 1996, and what I was doing last Tuesday has already escaped me. These particular moments are ambiguous. The memories that find their way back into my present thoughts are for one reason or another particularly dignified. They find their way and have become the defining factors of how my character has come to be. So I ask myself, where do memories come from? How, or why do certain events remain in my thoughts while others slip away? What had happened in those lost moments? When we are forced to connect the dots of our past, one inevitable side effect occurs. We obtain a distorted version of the original moment, where the missing pieces must be filled in and translated.

Qualia is a body of work I have created to present my journey. How we feel a memory certainly is unaccompanied by directions. These moments are filled with uncertainties to how, when, or why certain events took place. The work catalogs my curiosity of how our thoughts travel through the missing moments of life. It is within my recycled thoughts that I can examine the fragments, gaps, and transformations.

Qualia, by definition, is being aware that we are having an experience, it is the acknowledgement of a sensation. I have created a body of work to explore the sensation of recalling memories. The mixed media exhibition brings to life my curiosity about memory and the search to understand it.

WHAT IS MEMORY?

Memory is an organism's ability to store, retain, and recall information. "The late nineteenth and early twentieth century put memory within the paradigms of cognitive psychology." This internal mental process occurs in three main stages in the formation and retrieval of a memory:

- *Encoding* or registration (receiving, processing and combining of received information)

- *Storage* (creation of a permanent record of the encoded information)
- *Retrieval, recall or recollection* (calling back the stored information in response to some cue for use in a process or activity)

Through analysis and decades of research, memory has been dissected into these three categories. Encoding, storage, and retrieval are all essential to understanding the mental processing that occurs during the act of remembering.

Our bodies feel, see, hear, touch and smell what is around us. Thoughts are a processing of that knowledge and knowledge itself. It is our ability to acknowledge a moment, a smell, a taste, or a color that aids in inducing a retrieval of past experiences. When we experience a sensation we can attribute to it the mind as well as the body. We often take a journey from our unconscious to the conscious. This trip is taken in routes throughout the day that creates a teeter-totter affect as we sway back in forth inside our minds.

PROCESS

Daniel Gilbert, author and professor of psychology, wrote about the difference between the act of “experience” and being “aware”. He states that to experience involves an action. This action is interactive and requires a physical participation. To be aware means to see, which is a cognitive act inside our minds. (Gilbert). The two-fold play of experience and awareness is a driving factor to how the work in *Qualia* was produced. The physical process of *Qualia* required me to produce over 400 handmade sheets of flax paper. I also created a series of prints in a variety of mediums such as collagraph, lithography, screenprint, and hand drawing. The processes I chose to use in the creation of the work reflect certain characteristics that are important to how I have come to understand our physical and cognitive states.

Paper fibers, drawing, printmaking, and found objects cumulatively play a role in the series. Visually I have created an array of abstraction and confusion, aligned with beauty and sensitivity they come together to perform the *act* of experience and the nuances in its mystery. A pathway, or journey is presented within each piece. Fragments, gaps and folding are the visual forms I have chosen to represent how I see memory. When I look

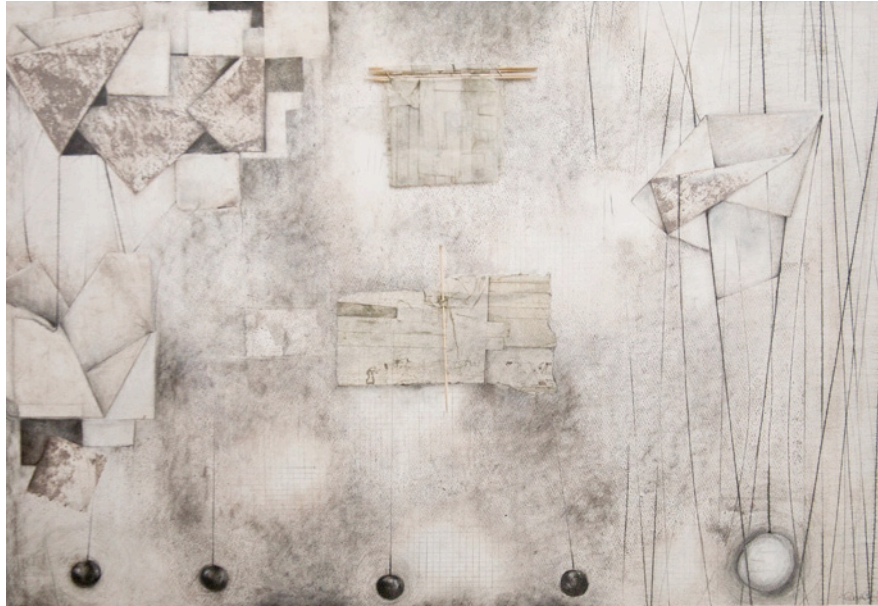
back into my past I can only sense momentary debris, in brief flashes, that I must patch back together. All the work produced is a reenactment of that process. I can deconstruct a print or drawing until reality and fiction begin to collide. I have found that by letting go of an original state, by transforming it, I can begin to feel the process of memory, the “act” of memory come alive.

PRINTMAKING: TRANSLATING COLLAGRAPHS AND DRAWINGS

Collography is a printmaking technique that produces a wide range of value and texture. The word collagraph is derived from the Greek word *koll* or *kola* and graph. Koll or kola, is greek for glue. Graph is a term used to describe the act of drawing. A collagraph print is a collage board that is printed in the intaglio process of printmaking. Fabrics, leaves, tape, sand, string or any other thin object can be adhered with glue to a flat base, known as the matrix, which is then inked and printed. The resulting print mimics the textures and shapes that had been glued to the base.

In several prints I have utilized folded pieces of paper. I chose this familiar form to play on its recognizable character. A folded piece of paper, a post it note and the pages in our notebooks contain numerous accounts of things which we want to remember. Notations can aid in remembering. I utilize folded paper to demonstrate stages of transformation and mimic states of thought. The ability to take one sheet of paper and fold it in various ways is an act. This is a purposeful act that can be performed and experienced to produce multiple outcomes.

This precarious act that has launched my research is my insatiable desire to battle the enigmatic. I have noted that to search into my past, forcefully at times, sends me into mismatched emotions and altered memories. “We are all but cloud made” has become a mantra in which I hold onto. With every waking moment, and every conversation we have, we fold into our thoughts and exist in an ever-changing state.



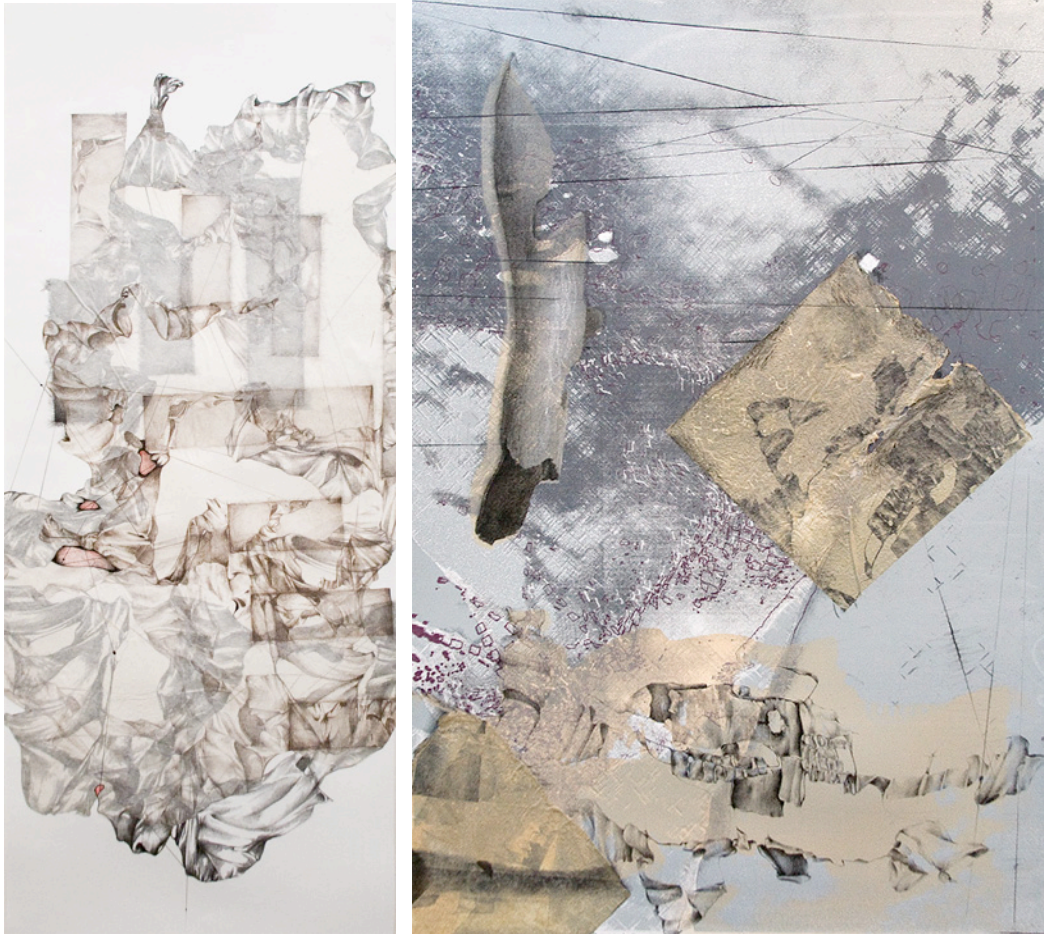
Precedent Action
Collagraph, screenprint, chin-colle and graphite

The textures that can be achieved by printing collagraph plates have endless possibilities. A vital role to finishing each print is the drawing process. This has become a step where I re-evaluate folded shapes and pockets of missing imagery. As I work through synchronizing the skipping stones of my past memories, I can learn to adapt to what may be missing and conjure ways to restore the holes. The confusion of forms being folded together or getting lost in a fog is an aesthetic choice I have made to demonstrate my process of mental cognition.

The transformation of an original state is an underlying theme throughout the work. The path I am walking in Qualia is that of *occasional visibility*. In “Lemmata”, the work walks the fine line between a very particular play on what is seen and what is kept secret.

Lemata is derived from Indian and western culture. In India it is understood as a sedimentary or rock particle. In the west, lemata is used for many craft arts where a tinsel or thread is used. *Lemmata*, with two m’s, is Greek for ‘that which is peeled away’. What is peeled away is the intended way of understanding this series.(Adams, 168). The autobiographical nature that is present in these works is about the journey of a growth beyond the past. Lemmata represents the peeling away of thoughts. The origin of the imagery is from soybean bags that hang shredded in a barn at my father’s home. Time has made the bags pull apart and transition into something I deem to be a beautiful

portrayal of change. The bags, represented in this print are almost impossible to see as soybean bags. Through the abstraction of the photograph and the printmaking media, what has been translated to a sheet of paper was based off of a soybean bag, but has grown and altered in hue, texture and form. It is not a literal woven material but a photographed, drawn and printed version of the original. It is a triple separation from its source, but cites the original source, my altered memory of those bags.



Lemmata Series 1 & 2
Lithography, Screenprint, chin-colle, graphite

TRANSFORMING PAPER

Our bodies process through our sensations in a magnitudinal decree of secret pathways with which we are in a constant dance with. The use of flax, an organic fiber, is a valuable asset in the site specific paper installation that is comprised of over 400 hand

pulled sheets of paper and stretches over 20 feet along the wall. Flax can be grown worldwide but the processing of flax is contained within a system of variables that are dependent upon the region or geography in which it is grown as well as how it is intended to be used. The seeds are historically known for their ability to heal. When consumed, they can slow down the growth of cancer cells and many other diseases. The flax fiber is very long. Through peeling the stem of the plant into strands then shredded and beaten for several hours, the flax fiber allows for a transparent finish when used in handmade papers.



Sway
Flax fiber, found object

The therapeutic system required to produce the work is methodical in its approach. There is a system in how I create each individual sheet. Each sheet is constructed in four steps. I will pull an initial, very thin sheet of paper and lay it out. After the initial sheet is pulled I then lay out tall grasses and stems. I embed these found objects by sandwiching them with another thin sheet of pulp. The final, and most interesting step is allowing the flax to dry. As the forms dry overnight shrinking takes place. The stems and grasses give the sheet a structure to wrap around. The nature of flax is its ability to shrink. The fibers inherently pull as tightly together as they can. If an obstacle, or obstruction, is embedded into the form it will coil and warp around itself until the fibers are fully dried.

Each piece speaks differently to its use as an indexical symbol as well as a suggestion. The skin-like quality of the dried flax paper operates alongside a personal metaphor and a collected notion of wholeness. That wholeness can be found in my desire to discover personal well being. It is an attempt to find security and comfort. As I view this work I can see the steps in which I created it, but through the finished pieces I

appreciate what has occurred naturally, outside my control. On site, each sheet of the formed paper is sewn together into loose shapes and intuitively hung along the wall creating a mass of forms. The mass is a dwelling of hours and hours of my thoughts, swallowed into cocoons, and delicately floating above the viewer. The sum of all these parts, the “whole” continues to shape shift, as does the paper during the drying process. This shifting, like the ocean of thoughts streaming through our minds, never truly finds a complete state of rest. These forms are suggestive of the swaying of my memories, a folding of challenging and beautiful experiences of my past and my present curiosity to peer through their mysteries.

Sensation, in and of itself is derived from an already understood notion of experience but most notably encountered when a heightened sensory encounter occurs. When one is surrounded, for example, by a tidal wave that is quick and unexpected we can more easily note a lack of acceptable breathing, a flash coldness of the water and a noise so overwhelming that perhaps our bodies go into a shock state for a reason. The paper installation is a balance of heightened experience, placed within a calm connection between each form acquired through each other.

AESTHETIC AND CONCEPTUAL INFLUENCES

The tri-fold system in which the creation and transformation of our memories and how they operate involves a disordered order. Order is understood as something organized and in sequence. There is an order and a sequence to how I process the mixed media drawings as well as how I pull each individual paper form. A disorder, in opposition, is when chaos ensues. The chaos is what I do not control as I allow the work to finish its creation outside of me. When the flax paper dried they shrank, and the textures created by a collagraph plate are effects I can utilize as something I couldn't have completely created on my own. The drawings that are applied after the plate is printed is an attempt to reclaim order, which is the same attempt as I sew and twist the paper forms during installation.

The work of Jylian Gustlin, as one of many examples, utilizes the Fibonacci sequence in a manner of ordered chaos. Her use of symbol and construction mimics numbers and their balance and sway around each other.



Jylian Gustlin
Quantum Placeat

Her numbers represent a repetition, repeated in a growing circle and rotated around with language within a sequence. The use of a circles and grids are derived from a belief that if a square that is rigid and strong can become a soft and smooth circle, then one can assume that vice versa can occur. Ultimately, it is a goal to have both square and circle simultaneously exist. This metaphor does not intend to change itself from its original state but to grow out and towards a new state of being. I have referenced the works of artists like Jylian Gustlin to explore my interest in perception and how I work through my thoughts. Circular shapes, strings, pockets and grids are the visual form I have given to demonstrate my shifting state in an attempt to piece my thoughts together. I use holes and pockets on the surface of things to draw a viewer into a pause. A pause acts as a reconsideration that denotes when a rhythm of thoughts loses you. This very experience can be found in any standard conversation. To repeat a story is like pulling the puzzle pieces back together in an attempt to illustrate to someone else what you are thinking. However, certain moments are always skipped. Never, can one thing be completely and 100% re-described. This is natural, this is perfectly normal and this is exactly how we speak to each other and to ourselves.

I once tried to describe my childhood bedroom window to a friend. I described the nuances of the chipped paint, the faded blue color that was pulling away to uncover

the rotting wood beneath it. Growing up in an old farmhouse I was surrounded by fields and could look out and see four other homes and a few barns in the distance. I began to describe this window, where I would sit and look out from the 2nd story bedroom and daydream. At night I could watch the fireflies, and during the day I could watch the wind tremble across the corn stalks and create wave-like patterns in the fields. As I described this particular memory, it was only a brief statement of a series of experiences. I did not describe walking from the doorway to the window. I didn't note going downstairs for supper before arriving back at my lookout to watch the fireflies in the evening. We do not have the time or capacity to hold onto every sliver of even a single moment. Instead, we paraphrase. Through the regrouping of memories we see the gaps and the reconstruction of our pasts emerge.

This key concept is inseparable but not completely united as the thoughts behind the individual pieces adhere to a play of difference through deconstruction. "From the time of the French Revolution, the image of the philosopher was one of the intellectual engage" (Powell, 4) To engage with the work requires a formula to satisfy our desire to organize in order to understand it. The capacity to engage to it, through a sensory understanding, is a memorialization of the anonymous and an ambiguity embedded within it. In *Qualia*, I require the viewer to engage in a way as if to willfully emit change through subtle application, make sense of the ambiguity while at the same time never fully reaching a completed order.

A syntagma is buried amidst associations and metaphors in this work. It is human nature to abide by this way of thinking, otherwise we would be stuck in the fog of lost thoughts. In my attempt to break free of what is missing I place it in my work to demonstrate something in which a passive voice is meant to be discovered. A discovery that often times becomes one that tickles your being when possibly being unidentifiable to its source or its cause.

What is indicative of my research and the series produced is an intangible space. This idea rides in the realm of what is true and what has been unknowingly adapted through separation. "Spice Window" by artist Dieter Roth, uses organized fragments to group and demonstrate a separation. The spice rack is indeed a cohesive body. It is contained within the same structure but the spices themselves have been filtered and

separated. This departure, or separation is not meant to be a forceful act but a diffused awareness. What is true and what is false walk a similar path with one another to establish their individual clarity. The clarity often times is interchangeable, for what may appear to be pure could very well be contaminated and what may be false could in fact be a raw truth.



Dieter Roth
Spice Window

In a transformation, in the retrieval of a memory, we can hold onto patterns or reoccurrences to help aid in understanding what can be learned through how it is broken down. Unfortunately this often happens in indiscernible ways. In lacuna, or gaps, we begin to explore the essence of secrets. A secret has the power to scar but obtains a character of change. In the winding road in which minds travel to this infinite location is seen in the evidence of perceptual studies. Perception, is yet another key ingredient to understanding sensation and mental cognition. Gabriel Orozco's body of work captures the ambiguity of conscious thought that meets an unconscious awareness. What is believed to be real becomes distorted in a double exposed and schizophrenic way of seeing. His ability to break down an object and re-characterize it is a fascinating portrayal of how we acquire our understandings of that around us. His *Lintel* series of photographs are depictions of lint collected from tumble dryers. As spoken very eloquently in Frieze, he has frozen a moment of subliminal awe that exists beyond human reasoning. His ability to capture a viewer's attention via altered perception and repetition makes the pieces breathe in front of our eyes like washing them in a soaked towel.



Gabriel Orozco
Lintels

This process, much like the process of creating the paper forms is important. Because of the gaps in our memories and the struggle to remember anything with accuracy, I have used the method of re-creating, or making alternative translations in each piece. I can take one particular matrix and print it various times. The matrix becomes re-contextualized if I flip it, layer it or paint over it. In the same manner I can take an idea, a folded piece of paper, a congealed texture, or woven form and continually rework it, with the absolute intent of translating it into something new.

CONCLUSION

My journey to depict the cloud of memory and being in Qualia has emerged with an open voice. The paper sculptures demonstrate a floating gravity of constant meditation. They willfully fold in upon themselves, like the folded papers in the drawings, like a constant re-definition of how we understand them. I find myself willing the paper to move but they remain in a static state, suspended in a performance.

To accept the human condition beyond our mental apparatus we must agree to accept our physical selves. Our bodies are but a vessel to carry the thoughts and emotions that we understand in the mind. We are carried in these bodies given to us through space and time. This space is a felt but invisible domain. What surrounds us is not seen but only recognized through what is felt in the most physical sense of the word. The void of space alongside the presence of sensation is a tricky ground to walk, but

more often than not we succeed at doing so because do we truly know any different? The skin which we wear connects us to others and objects around us, as well as reaffirms what it is we are thinking in our minds. That which informs us comes from the present as well as through the various flavors of experience in the memory of a past.

The physical and tactile nature of the work presented is what is touched as well as our ability to imagine and how we feel emotion. What you see is what we remember. The thoughts and memories we have acquired through time in these visuals is what we use to construct our worlds today.

As with a cloud, as we are but cloud made, the ability to 'be' in and of thyself is the final question presented to the audience as a choice which ultimately is theirs to make. Inspired visually by the works of Mona Hatoum, Barbara Bloom, Eva Hesse and many others through sensitivity to material and the inalienable question of implied visibility of a unique experience.

"Qualia: There is no body that is not cloud made" is a 16-month development that has undergone radical change and experimentation. Through it's struggles and triumphs it has rediscovered a new path that can exist in contemporary society. It is not meant to challenge the viewer, but to calm and allow for a sense of place that is ephemeral. By "personalizing the engagement of the audience in the work, artworks enter into ways of living and models of action within the existing real." (Bourriard).

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